

OrdnanceReports

News updates from around the world



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This publication is produced by the U.S. Army Ordnance Corps Communications Coordinator. The purpose of this publication is to provide Command Information materiel concerning world events and the U.S. military's role in those events. Ordnance specific events will be covered if appropriate. Direct your correspondence to Ed Starnes at 410-278-2415 (DSN 298-2415), or email edward.starnes@ocs.apg.army.mil.

Sandstorms thwart U.S., British missions

by Meg Richards, Associated Press

Sandstorms slowed U.S. and British forces to a crawl and thwarted air missions Tuesday as U.S.-led forces edged closer to the Iraqi capital. Baghdad residents, hunkered down for an eventual battle, woke to howling winds and the distant crash of artillery.

British Prime Minister Tony Blair, providing an overview of the military campaign, said the coalition had secured a key southern port despite tenacious resistance, and had much of the western desert in hand.

He said the allies launched air attacks on targets in the northern oil centers of Mosul and Kirkuk, as well as Saddam Hussein's hometown of Tikrit, and that troops were making advances in eastern Iraq to help defend two main bridges over the Euphrates.

Blair stressed that the final miles on the road to Baghdad would be the most challenging, as U.S. Army troops face the Medina division of Saddam's Republican Guard. "This will plainly be a crucial moment," he said.

The Army met sporadic resistance on its journey north. A report from the 3rd Infantry Division's headquarters estimated 500 Iraqis were killed during a two-day sweep past the holy Shiite city of Najaf, said Command Sgt. Maj. Kenneth Preston of the Army's V Corps. At least 20 U.S. troops have been killed and 14 captured or missing since the operation began.

President Bush, asking Congress for \$74.7 billion to pay for six months of combat, said Tuesday that coalition forces are "on a steady advance" but said he could not predict how long the war will last.

Support for the ground troops advancing on Baghdad is increasingly becoming the focus of Navy air power, said

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U.S. Army 3rd Infantry Division troops from the A Company 3rd Battalion 7th Infantry Regiment weather the elements as a sandstorm at dusk turns the desert blood red near Karbala Tuesday, March 25, 2003. The sandstorm grounded many US-led forces bombing overflights over Iraq and slowed U.S. military progress in the area near Karbala Tuesday. (AP Photo/John Moore)

Coalition aircraft flew more than 1,500 sorties over Iraq

by Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 25, 2003 — Coalition aircraft flew more than 1,500 sorties in the continuing air war against the regime in Iraq on March 24, coalition officials in the region said today.

More than 800 were strike sorties, with 200 of those being flown against “preplanned” targets. The rest were flown against “emerging targets” — targets of opportunity.

Coalition aircraft strike to suppress ballistic missile threats, to degrade Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard units, to support special operations forces and to strike targets of opportunity as they arise, U.S. Central Command officials said.

Coalition air operations are aimed at the regime of Saddam Hussein

Another air assault launched in Afghanistan

by Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 25, 2003 — Coalition forces conducted another air assault in the Sami Ghar Mountains of Afghanistan today, Combined Joint Task Force-180 officials said.

Officials would not give the size of the assault. They did say fewer than 1,000 forces are assigned to Operation Valiant Strike.

The assault troops used U.S. Chinook and Black Hawk helicopters. They immediately found a large weapons cache that included rocket-propelled grenades, anti-tank mines, mortar rounds and other weapons.

Since the operation began on March 20, there has been no enemy contact, said Army Capt. Alayne Cramer, a CJTF-180 spokeswoman. Troops have detained four Afghans and uncovered several large weapons caches.

Officials said it is hard to put precise numbers on the number of active Taliban in the area. The most common number they cite is between 50 and 100.

The majority of the troops involved in the operation come from the 82nd Airborne Division. However, there is support from a Romanian mortar platoon and special operations forces.

Cramer said the operation is proceeding smoothly, and coalition forces are searching villages and cave complexes.

U.S. service members patrolling near Shkin encountered enemy personnel. A firefight ensued, and the enemy broke contact.

At Bagram Air Base, U.S. personnel held a short memorial service for the six airmen killed in the crash of a Pave Hawk helicopter on March 23. After the short service, Bagram Air Base shut down for “a minute” as service members lined the route to the runway and paid their final respects to their comrades, Cramer said.

and not against the Iraqi people, officials stressed.

They said specific targets in and around Baghdad include the government control center, the offices of the Special Security Organizations, the headquarters of the Special Republican Guards and the Iraqi Intelligence Service.

Unsung heroes in the war are the flying gas stations, according to Air Force officials, who say that “no bomb gets dropped without refueling.” The tankers fly about 15 percent of the total sorties; aerial refueling allows strike aircraft to race in at high speed and get back to base safely.



Scottish flag: A Scottish flag flies on an armored personnel carrier of the British forces Queen's Dragoon Guards, as it speeds on Kuwaiti territory, in this photo made available, Monday. (AP Photo/Tam McDonald/POOL)

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Allies take 3,500 captive, Rumsfeld says

by Matt Kelley

WASHINGTON (AP) - U.S. and allied forces have now taken in "excess of 3,500 Iraqi prisoners," Defense Secretary Donald H. Rumsfeld said Tuesday.

At a Pentagon briefing, Rumsfeld said humanitarian assistance "food, water and medicine" is already being delivered. Still, after five days of ground combat, he sought to minimize expectations of a swift end to the war

"We're still, needless to say, much closer to the beginning than the end," Rumsfeld said.

In addition to the prisoners in custody, Rumsfeld said that thousands of other Iraqi fighters have abandoned their units. He said the United States was treating prisoners in accordance with the Geneva Convention and is giving the International Red Cross access to them. He urged the Iraqis to do the same with coalition prisoners.

Asked about reports of an uprising in Basra, Iraq's second largest

U.S. says Iraq may use chemical weapons near Baghdad

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld said on Tuesday intelligence information he has received indicates Iraqi military forces may use chemical weapons against U.S.-led invasion forces as they close in on Baghdad.

During a Pentagon briefing, Rumsfeld said he received intelligence information "that suggests that the closer that coalition forces get to Baghdad and Tikrit, the greater the likelihood (of the use of chemical weapons), and that some command and control arrangements have been put in place."

But he referred to the data as "intelligence scraps" and "chatter in the system" and said, "Who knows how accurate they are?" He did not give details on how this intelligence information was gathered or who provided it.



Australian commandos use night vision equipment to conduct a night patrol. Australian Defence Force photo by Darren Hilder

city, Rumsfeld said that he was aware that Fedayeen guerrillas loyal to Saddam Hussein were infiltrating the city, and said they represented "a terrorist-type threat" against coalition forces.

Rumsfeld said he had not seen reports of an uprising against the Iraqi regime in Basra.

He said the confrontation between coalition forces and the Republican Guard divisions south of Baghdad are "where the difficult task begins." U.S. helicopters attacking the Medina division of the guard came under heavy fire Monday and eventually withdrew.

Rumsfeld rejected criticism that the invasion was launched without enough troops or armor. He said military leaders were "very comfortable" with the war plan and that forces were continuing to pour into Iraq "every minute of every hour of the day."

Air Force Gen. Richard Myers, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said the invasion was on track. "It's a brilliant plan," Myers said, noting that allied forces were closing in on Baghdad.



A US Army engineer points his M249 rifle in front of a burned out Iraqi truck during a sandstorm in the desert north of the city of Najaf in central Iraq, March 24, 2003. Sandstorms, snipers and cynicism hampered the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq on the sixth day of war on Tuesday, and military analysts said the campaign could go on for two weeks to a month longer. Just when the entire country might be subdued and its cities secured was an open question. Reuters photo.

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Sandstorms thwart U.S., British missions continued

Capt. Patrick Driscoll, commander of the more than 70-plane air wing aboard the USS Kitty Hawk.

U.S. officials said they believe Iraq is more likely to use chemical or biological weapons against coalition troops the closer they get to Baghdad. The Republican Guard controls the bulk of Iraq's chemical weaponry, most of which can be fired from artillery guns or short-range rocket launchers, according to U.S. officials.

Military analyst John Abrams, a retired Army four-star general, said coalition forces would try to avoid street warfare once they get to Baghdad.

"Chechnya did not work for the Russians," Abrams told The Associated Press. "You're going to have to get into a framework of precision operations ... but you have to have very, very solid intelligence."

In other developments:

- In a friendly fire incident, an American F-16 fired on a U.S. Patriot missile battery in Iraq after the battery's radar locked on the plane, the U.S. Central Command said Tuesday. No U.S. casualties were reported. The strike Monday was the war's second such incident involving Patriot batteries apparently failing to distinguish between friendly and hostile targets.

- Coalition forces destroyed six satellite jamming devices, which Iraq was using to try to thwart American precision guided weapons, Air Force Maj. Gen. Victor Renuart said. He said the devices have had "no effect" on U.S. military operations.

Bad weather caused the military to call back combat missions from two aircraft carriers, and two Army divisions were virtually stalled in a vicious sandstorm that reduced visibility to a few feet.

Thousands of Marines trekking north toward Baghdad traveled only about 20 miles in five hours, buffeted by heavy winds and blowing sand. While Iraq often sees sandstorms in the spring, meteorologists said this one was exceptional.

Still, the Army's 3rd Infantry Division advanced to within 60 miles of Baghdad early Tuesday and pounded military installations with howitzers and rockets. U.S. warplanes and helicopters had come under heavy fire Monday during their first attacks on Republican Guard units.

In Monday's helicopter assault, the first known engagement in central Iraq, about 10 Iraqi tanks were destroyed. One Apache helicopter went down, and the Pentagon said two pilots had been taken prisoner - Chief Warrant Officer Ronald D. Young Jr., 26, of Lithia Springs, Ga., and Chief Warrant Officer David S. Williams, 30, of Orlando, Fla. Military officials later said they had destroyed the helicopter, but did not say how.

In the south, a pattern of deadly ambushes and ruse attacks by Iraqi militiamen in civilian clothes have hampered the efforts of coalition forces, and sporadic fighting forced firefighters to withdraw from



United States Air Force Maj. Gen. Victor E. Renuart addresses members of the media during a news conference at the Coalition Media Center, at Camp As Sayliyah, in Doha, Qatar, Tuesday, March 25, 2003. Renuart spoke on issues concerning progress in the war on Iraq. (AP Photo/Steven Senne)

burning oil fields. British officials said Umm Qasr, Iraq's only deep-water port, was secure, though it could take several days before humanitarian aid deliveries begin because the waterway must be swept for mines.

British officials also said they would target pro-Saddam militiamen in the main southern city of Basra; coalition commanders had previously said they wanted to avoid urban combat there.

"Basra is surrounded and cannot be used as an Iraqi base," Blair said in a news conference Tuesday. "But in Basra there are pockets of Saddam's most fiercely loyal security services who are holding out. They are contained but still able to inflict casualties on our troops, and so we are proceeding with caution."

Heavy fighting continued in An Nasiriyah, considered a strategic prize because of its bridges across the Euphrates. Navy pilots pounded Iraqi artillery and ammunition posts about 45 miles northwest of Basra overnight into Tuesday morning, U.S. officials said. Two British soldiers were killed at Az Zubayr, an Iraqi navy port not far from Basra.

Air Marshal Brian Burridge, commander of British forces in the Persian Gulf, said a Baath party headquarters in Az Zubayr was targeted late Monday by the First Battalion Black Watch, whose members are mostly from Scotland.

Troops advancing toward Baghdad said they were prepared for the fight ahead, despite news of fallen comrades.

"I think the deaths of Americans gives us more incentive to fight," said Lance Cpl. Chad Borgmann, 23, of Sidney, Neb., with the 15th Marine Expeditionary Force. "Freeing Iraq is all fine and dandy ... but this gives us a personal motivation to fight."

Aussie naval gunfire destroys artillery battery, bunkers

by Gunnery Sgt. Charles Portman, U.S. Central Command

CAMPAS SAYLIYAH, QATAR, March 24, 2003 — Australian naval gunfire destroyed Iraqi coastal defensive positions, an artillery battery and bunkers overnight, said Brigadier Maurie McNarn, commander of Australian forces in the Middle East.

The engagement against the artillery battery and bunkers “lasted about 30 minutes, and some 46 rounds were fired,” McNarn said at a press briefing here today.

Aussie warships are supporting coalition forces, which include British Royal Marine Commandos advancing north on the Al Faw Peninsula. The warship HMAS Anzac used its main armament – a forward mounted 5 inch gun – to strike the positions.

“Australia’s contribution to the coalition, while a niche force, is designed to be potent, effective and leading edge,” McNarn said.

The Aussie’s involvement to disarm Iraq is known as Operation Falconer, and includes a fighting force of more than 2,000 Australian Defense Force personnel.

The Aussie maritime force is commanded by Capt. Peter Jones onboard the command ship HMAS Kanimbla. Captain Jones’ headquarters includes United Kingdom staff and Kuwaiti and U.S. liaison officers. He commands a mixture of Australian, U.S. and U.K. warships.

Rigid hull inflatable boats are assigned to the maritime force to conduct intercept missions. Brigadier McNarn said intercept missions have been quite successful in seizing mines in the waters near southern Iraq.

The Special Forces task group assigned to the operation includes a squadron from the Special Air Service Regiment, commandos, Chinook CH-47 helicopters and an incident response team.

The task group is operating “deep inside Iraq,” McNarn said. “It is integrated closely to the coalition effort and is performing its primary role of long-range reconnaissance,” he said.

Gen. Tommy Franks, the U.S. commander of Operation Iraqi Freedom,



Australian CH47 Chinook helicopters from the Townsville-based 5th Aviation Regiment provide Coalition Forces in the Middle East with medium lift capability transporting troops, vehicles and equipment. The aircraft has proven itself working with the Australian Army's 3rd Brigade by providing essential support to deployed elements. While the Chinook has been in service since the Vietnam war, this variant remains one of the latest additions to the Australian Army's aviation capability. Australian Defence Force photo by Darren Hilder

said many areas in Iraq are under coalition control. Special operation forces from the United Kingdom, Australia and the United States “are about their business,” he said.

“From left to right and top to bottom; in the west and also in the north,” Franks said, “they have accomplished some wonderful things. They are operating in small teams; they’re very, very mobile and they’re doing for us just exactly what we want to have them do.”

Members of the Australian task group have been in contact with enemy forces on several occasions, McNarn said. He cited one incident in which Special Forces medics stopped to render medical assistance to two wounded Iraqi soldiers before continuing on with their mission.

Yesterday, Australian Special Forces called in an air strike on an enemy installation that appears to have contained missile handling equipment, Australian Defense officials said.

An Australian squadron of F/A-18 Hornet fighter aircraft is deployed to the Persian Gulf region for Operation Falconer, and commenced operations over Iraq from the first day of the conflict.

On the issue of command and control, McNarn said Australian forces are closely integrated with U.S. and British forces, “but Australian forces remain at all times under Australian command.”

Iraq flouting laws of war, Geneva Conventions

by Jim Garamone, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 24, 2003 –The Iraqi regime is flouting the laws of war and the Geneva Conventions, said Pentagon spokeswoman Victoria Clarke at the news conference today.

Clarke said that the deceptions have been so blatant “that some liken it to terrorism.”

“They are sending forces out carrying white surrender flags or dressing them as liberated civilians to draw coalition forces into ambushes,” Clarke said. “Both of these actions are among the most serious violations of the laws of war.”

These actions – called “perfidy or treachery” by law – are strictly prohibited because of the effect they have on attacking troops. Those troops would be loath to accept surrenders from troops who engage in such acts.

Secondly, disguising soldiers as civilians mean that occupying troops cannot protect civilians. “Such acts involve the enemy willfully violating the laws of war, while simultaneously taking advantage of the coalitions’ compliance to the laws of war,” Clarke said.

She again addressed Iraqi treatment of coalition prisoners of war. “As we said yesterday, it is a blatant violation of the Geneva Conventions to humiliate and abuse prisoners of war or to harm them in any way,” she said.

She reiterated President Bush’s vow that those who harm prisoners will be found and punished as war criminals. She said the Iraqi regime must allow the International Red Cross to see the POWs.

Army Maj. Gen. Stanley McChrystal, the vice director of operations for the Joint Staff, expressed his sympathy to the families of those

taken prisoner and assured them that “we will press on and do everything we can to bring them home safely.”

Still, the behavior of the Iraqi regime has in no way stopped the coalition, he said, and control of Iraq continues to slip away from the Saddam Hussein’s regime as coalition forces close in on Baghdad.

McChrystal said coalition bombing is aimed at the regime of Saddam Hussein and at specific targets in and around Baghdad. These include the government control center, the offices of the Special Security Organizations, the headquarters of the Special Republican Guards and the Iraqi Intelligence Service.

Still, mistakes happen. “Early this morning a coalition aircraft was dropping ordnance on a bridge 100 miles from the Syrian border,” McChrystal said. “After the bombs were released, a bus came into the pilot’s view, but too late to recall the weapons.

“The bombs struck the bridge and the bus. Unintended casualties like this are regrettable. We extend our sympathies to the families of those civilians who were accidentally killed.”

The operations expert said land forces are more than 200 miles into Iraqi territory. “Coalition forces have engaged Republican Guard Medina Division troops with attack helicopters,” McChrystal said. No direct-fire engagements have occurred yet.

Coalition air forces flew more than 1,000 sorties on March 23, according to McChrystal. Besides focusing on key regime leadership targets, he noted air strikes continue to suppress ballistic missile threats, to degrade Republican Guard and Special Republican Guard units, to support special operations forces and to strike targets of opportunity as they arise.

Coalition aircraft have dropped more than 2,000 precision- guided munitions since the beginning of the operation.



An M-1 Abrams tank equipped with a mine plow leads an armored convoy of Marines pushing toward Baghdad, Iraq. Marines are within 50 miles of the capital. (Sun photo by John Makely)

Wolfowitz: Iraq war is part of global anti-terror efforts

by Gerry J. Gilmore, American Forces Press Service

WASHINGTON, March 24, 2003 – Operation Iraqi Freedom “is all a part of the war on terrorism,” U.S. Deputy Defense Secretary Paul D. Wolfowitz said here March 23.

The United States wouldn’t be risking service members’ lives in Iraq today, Wolfowitz pointed out, solely because Saddam Hussein is a dictator.

“He is a tyrant, but more importantly, he’s a tyrant who threatens us by his connections to terrorism and his weapons of mass destruction,” Wolfowitz remarked during an interview with American Forces Radio and Television Service.

Wolfowitz noted that “quite a few terrorists died” during March 21 strikes against a terrorist complex located in northern Iraq.

And American and coalition forces “are still chasing terrorists in Afghanistan (and) we’re still finding evidence in Pakistan or in the Philippines that’s leading us to terrorists who are planning attacks against the United States,” he pointed out.

“This is a global war,” Wolfowitz emphasized, that is “going to go on for some time.”

Anti-terrorism forces are conducting a variety of valuable tasks, he noted, whether on the front lines in Iraq, in the mountains of Afghanistan, performing civil actions in the Philippines, or somewhere in the United States examining complex collected intelligence.

“It’s all part of a single effort that’s really government- wide,” Wolfowitz pointed out, noting that U.S. intelligence and law enforcement agencies have achieved “great successes” against terrorists.

“But a lot of those successes would not have been possible without the work that the military is doing,” he declared.

Wolfowitz assured those service members engaged in activities outside Iraq that their efforts are also being observed — and appreciated.

Each day, he said, Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld is briefed on Afghanistan, the Philippines and other aspects of the war against global terrorism, as well as current circumstances on the Korean peninsula.

Such global concerns demonstrate why the United States requires a robust defense budget, Wolfowitz pointed out, adding that America, indeed, has “big responsibilities.”

“And we have a lot of people, fortunately, who are willing to volunteer to serve in our military to carry out those responsibilities,” he noted.

Wolfowitz said he, President Bush and Secretary Rumsfeld are “truly grateful for their service.”

Credit for the military successes gained in Iraq so far must also go to the war planners, he pointed out.

“An enormous degree of operational and tactical surprise was achieved,” Wolfowitz said, when the U.S. and its coalition partners decided to target Saddam’s command-and- control headquarters and living complexes early in the campaign.

“Hopefully, that saved some lives,” he added.

Wolfowitz read an excerpt from an article in The Weekly Standard magazine, entitled “Why They Fight” by Stephen F. Hayes, who interviewed an Iraqi named David.

David, only identified by his first name, was one of a number of exiled Iraqi-Americans and some native Iraqis whom the United States had recruited and trained to assist U.S. troops when they arrived in Iraq.

In the article, David was asked what he thought of anti-war demonstrators, the deputy secretary continued. David replied that he was proud of the demonstrators, because that was what democracy and freedom was all about.

However, Wolfowitz added, David noted that those demonstrators wouldn’t have such freedom of speech in Saddam Hussein’s Iraq.

““Where you been when Saddam Hussein killed 100,000 Kurds?”” Wolfowitz quoted David asking the demonstrators.

““Where you been when he killed a million Iraqi soldiers and Iraqis and Iranians ... Where you been when he occupied Kuwait and killed over 1,000 Kuwaitis? ... Why nobody says nothing?”” David continued.

Wolfowitz then relayed David’s message for Saddam: ““What comes around, goes around. Now your time to go. Your time is up. Now we’re 21st century. No room for dictators.””



U.S. Marines make their way through a sandstorm to board a helicopter in the Kuwaiti desert today. Shortly after takeoff, the mission was turned back because of the bad weather. (AP photo)

Iraq's 'smoking gun' will be found, military says

by Angus MacSwan

KUWAIT CITY (Reuters) - U.S. and British military experts searching for weapons of mass destruction in Iraq are certain they will find the "smoking gun" that will vindicate the U.S.-led invasion, a planning team commander said on Tuesday.

Though no incriminating sites have yet been uncovered, the British and American experts expect to find many such sites close to the Iraqi capital Baghdad, if and when the U.S. military advance succeeds in capturing territory.

A number of captured Iraqi officials have already been questioned and provided information, said Wing Commander Seb Kendall of Britain's Royal Air Force Regiment, who heads a team planning what the military calls Sensitive Sites Exploitation.

"It's very important for a number of reasons — that he (Iraqi President Saddam Hussein) doesn't use this stuff, that we stop proliferation and that we produce the smoking gun. It's at the heart of the strategic

aim of why we're doing it," Kendall told Reuters in an interview.

Discovery of any sites connected to nuclear, chemical or biological weapons is vital for leaders in Washington and London. They face widespread international opposition to the war against Iraq, which was launched on the grounds that Saddam had lied about his weapons stockpiles and posed a world threat unless disarmed.

Saddam denies having weapons of mass destruction.

So far the evidence presented has left many questions unanswered and failed to sway a substantial slice of world opinion. War opponents have said the U.N. weapons inspection team, charged with disarming Iraq following its 1991 Gulf War defeat, should have been given more time to carry out its work.

Even chief U.N. weapons inspector Hans Blix, who also wanted more time for inspections, agreed the information provided by Iraq had been disappointing.

"Our experts have found so far that in substance only limited new information has been provided that will help to resolve remaining questions," he told the U.N. Security Council after the 134 arms inspectors left Iraq just over a week ago.

Intrusive search for banned weapons

Kendall's 12-strong team of British and American personnel works at the U.S. military Camp Doha in Kuwait, sifting through evidence and planning site inspections.

A task force of specialists charged with checking the suspected sites is already at work over the border.

They will operate in a very different way to the United Nations Monitoring, Verification and Inspection Commission, whose intent was to cooperate with Iraqi authorities and who pulled out of Baghdad on the eve of the war.

"We will be very intrusive, completely intrusive in the way we go about it because we've given up asking. It's all about finding the smoking gun and rendering it safe," Kendall said.

The team has a long list of leads and suspected sites, similar to the U.N. dossier, and based on intelligence from various sources including Iraqi military and civilian prisoners.

The list names hundreds of potential sites — ammunition storage depots, laboratories with a dual purpose, chemical plants — although many were likely to come up empty, he said.

"Certainly in these early stages, we don't expect much. But we do expect to find more the closer we get to Baghdad and that's where most of these sites are concentrated."

"The bottom line is it's not going to be an easy process, it's going to



A Tomahawk missile is launched from the guided missile cruiser USS Cape St. George in the eastern Mediterranean on Sunday. Photo by Kenneth Moll, U.S. Navy.

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U.S.-British forces ready for most chemical threats

By Patricia Reaney

LONDON (Reuters) - U.S and British troops were equipped to deal with most threats posed by chemical and biological weapons, officials said on Tuesday, amid reports Iraq had authorized use of such arms in defense of Baghdad.

The troops have NBC (nuclear, biological and chemical) protection suits and respirators and are provided with medication to inject themselves with if they are exposed to threats such as mustard gas and the nerve agents sarin and VX.

"Our NBC respirators will meet all likely threats," said a spokeswoman for Britain's Defense Ministry.

"Our troops will be safe and can continue operations, even if attacked with chemical and biological agents. These protection measures are supported by a wide range of detection and warning systems," she told Reuters.

U.S. television networks quoted unnamed U.S. officials on Monday as saying Iraq's leadership had drawn a "red line" around the map of Baghdad and that once U.S.-led forces had crossed it, the elite Republican Guard had been authorized to use chemical weapons. No other details were given.

U.S.-led forces have not yet found any evidence Iraq has weapons of mass destruction, but a U.S. general has said experts were investigating a number of sites that have caused concern. Iraq says it no longer has any arms of mass destruction.

"Extremely deadly"

In 1988, 5,000 Kurds were killed in a poison gas attack by Saddam's forces on the northern town of Halabja.



A young man, left, carrying a television antenna walks past Iraqi militiamen manning a sandbag position during a sandstorm in Baghdad Tuesday March 25, 2003. The city is already polluted by thick smoke from burning oil set ablaze by Iraqis as a defensive strategy against US and British warplanes. (AP Photo/Jerome Delay)

Peter Kaiser of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, an international watchdog group based in the Netherlands, said mustard gas, sarin and VX were the most frequently cited potential weapons.

"They are all extremely deadly," Kaiser said in an interview.

Sarin and VX attack the nervous system and mustard gas is a blistering agent that affects the membranes of the nose, throat and lungs.

Chemical attacks could be mounted in a variety of ways, such as through bombs and spray units attached to aircraft.

NBC suits consist of boots, trousers and a tunic made of three protective layers and a charcoal lining which acts as a filter against any deadly agents.

The suit can provide indefinite protection, but is usually worn for a maximum of 72 hours before a new one is issued.

"Not only do we have the protection suits, we have at least two systems of detection which are issued down to very junior levels," said a former British soldier, who asked not to be identified.

"If there is any warning that a chemical or biological attack is even possible, then these guys will have their detection systems out and switched on," he said.

Portable detection units, which are about the size of a small telescope, can alert troops to chemical agents released into the air.

Most modern fighting vehicles have air filtration systems that can keep out chemical agents.

U.S. and British forces have decontamination powder to wash down any vehicles and troops exposed to chemical agents.

"Since World War One there have been continuous efforts to create protective measures. The technology of protection is very well advanced," said Kaiser.

Iraq's 'smoking gun' will be found, military says continued

be a long and detailed search. Saddam Hussein is well known for his duplicity and his deceit and deception at hiding this stuff," he said.

U.S. and British officials are keenly aware that a confirmed discovery would be a propaganda coup. They have already promised journalists in Kuwait they would fly them by helicopter to any site where banned weapons are found as soon as possible.

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Secretary Rumsfeld interview with CNN Late Edition

(Interview with Wolf Blitzer, CNN Late Edition.)



Q: I'd like to interview the defense secretary right now. He is joining us live from our Washington studio. Secretary Rumsfeld, thanks so much for joining us. I know this is an incredibly busy time for you, but let's get right to some of the

immediate issues at hand. First of all, as you well know, within the past few moments, the Al Jazeera Arabic language television network has broadcast Iraqi television video of American POWs that they say are now in the hands of Iraqi officials. Some of them alive, others killed in action. What can you tell us about this?

Rumsfeld: There have been reports throughout the morning here in the East Coast to the effect that some U.S. soldiers were unaccounted for, whether the ones that are being shown on that particular station or not, that network, are those individuals, I'm not in a position to say.

We do know that the Geneva Convention makes it illegal for prisoners of war to be shown and pictured and humiliated. And it's something that the United States does not do. And needless to say, television networks that carry such pictures are, I would say, doing something that's unfortunate.

Q: On the other hand, you could argue, some would make the case that at least their family members are seeing them, seeing them alive even if they're not in the best of condition, they could get some comfort from seeing these videotaped pictures.

Rumsfeld: You can make that argument, if you wish.

Q: But what I hear you saying is that you're urging all worldwide news organizations, television networks not to broadcast these images of these American POWs?

Rumsfeld: What I'm saying is that it's a violation of the Geneva Convention for the Iraqis to be — if, in fact, that's what's taking place, to be showing prisoners of war in a humiliating manner.

Q: How many missing American military personnel are there right now?

Rumsfeld: The — I can't answer your question right now. I know as of this morning it was a very small number.

Q: Will this affect the course of the war, the fact that the Iraqis now have American POWs?

Rumsfeld: Wolf, there have been prisoners taken in every war since the beginning of mankind. We treat our prisoners well. We have over 2,000 Iraqi prisoners of war at the present time. They're in POW camps that have been brought along. They're being fed. They're being provided medicine where it's appropriate and needed.

The course of this war is clear. The outcome is clear. The regime of

Saddam Hussein is gone. It's over. It will not be there in a relatively reasonably predictable period of time. And the people in Iraq need to know that, that it will not be long before they will be liberated. The leadership and the military in Iraq needs to know that they should act with honor and stop defending a regime that is shortly going to be history.

Q: Mr. Secretary, this broadcast is being seen live around the world, including in Iraq. What is your message to those Iraqi government officials who now have control of these American prisoners?

Rumsfeld: That they treat those prisoners according to the Geneva Convention, just as we treat Iraqi prisoners according to the Geneva Convention. And further, I would say that they'd be well advised to put down their arms, follow the instructions that have been communicated, and act with honor and help liberate the Iraqi people from the vicious, repressive regime of Saddam Hussein. The outcome is clear.

Q: When you say it's predictable, the outcome is clear, how much time do you think it will take for the U.S. and British forces to achieve their objective?

Rumsfeld: At the present time, there are U.S., British, Australian and Polish forces that are on the ground. There's some 46 nations that are publicly politically supporting this coalition effort. There is a broad and deep coalition that is being enormously helpful in this effort, and their forces are wonderful, fine young people, as well.

The time — the time is going to depend on how much resistance there is, and the loss of life will depend on how much resistance there is. And our hope and our prayer is that this will end soon, with a minimal loss of life on the part of the Iraqis as well as the U.S. and coalition forces.

Q: Are you talking days, weeks or months?

Rumsfeld: We will be at it until it's over, and I do not — it's not possible to know. There are any number of things that could happen that would cause difficulties, that could delay things. But there is nothing that can happen that will change the ultimate outcome. The outcome is certain, and the armed forces of the Iraqi government should put down their arms, follow the instructions that they've been given and end any resistance at all, because it's futile.

Q: The Iraqis claim to have shot down a coalition aircraft over Baghdad. There were pictures of Iraqi troops firing into the Tigris river. Have all U.S. and coalition aircraft returned safely to their bases and aircraft carriers?

Rumsfeld: There have been — I know nothing about what you're saying that the Iraqis are saying about some river. There have been some aircraft that have not returned safely. One was a U.K. aircraft that was shot down by a Patriot battery, we believe, and that is being investigated. There were some helicopters that collided in

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Secretary Rumsfeld interview with CNN Late Edition continued

mid-air over Kuwait and did not return safely. To my knowledge, no other aircraft are missing or unaccounted for.

Q: There was a very disturbing incident, as you know, yesterday at Camp Pennsylvania here in Kuwait, involving apparently the suggestion is a U.S. soldier lobbed a grenade or more into a tent with officers and troops from the 101st Airborne Division. What can you tell us about that incident?

Rumsfeld: There is apparently an investigation that's under way at the present time, and an individual is the subject of that investigation. And that it has to run its course, and we'll find out precisely what took place.

Q: Do you have anything you could tell us about the motivation, what may have caused this individual to act?

Rumsfeld: I have no idea.

Q: And do you know if he was acting alone or in conspiracy with others?

Rumsfeld: The investigation will determine that, but I've heard no indication that there was any conspiracy.

Q: We're getting reports now from some of our embedded journalists on the front lines suggesting that the Iraqis are placing so-called human shields at various military and other strategic targets as U.S. and coalition forces move up towards Baghdad. If that's the case, will that deter you from going after those targets?

Rumsfeld: I do not have information to that effect, although we've seen photographs indicating that the Iraqis have written on the tops of some buildings that there are human shields there. That also is a violation of international law. The Iraqis have a practice of violating international law and ignoring international conventions and treaties.

Wolf, the outcome of this is determined. It's certain. This conflict is going to end, and the regime of Saddam Hussein will be gone. And it will end sooner if people behave rationally and put down their weapons and stop resisting. It will end longer if they are foolish and get themselves killed because they refused to surrender and put down their arms, but the outcome is clear. We are not going to be deterred, at all.

Q: Have U.S. and coalition forces encountered so far any evidence of Iraqi chemical or biological weapons, indeed, any weapons of mass destruction whatsoever?

Rumsfeld: Wolf, the coalition forces have been on the ground for something about 72 hours. The number of forces in Iraq grows every hour. They are basically in the south, moving towards Baghdad. They're in the west, worried about the Scud baskets in that area and trying to avoid having any missiles, ballistic missiles fired at neighboring countries, and they're in the north, working with Kurdish forces, and a number of teams up there. The task is to remove this regime and then go about the task of looking for weapons of mass

destruction. At the present time, they're focused on winning the war.

Q: Has there been any evidence that any of the missiles or rockets that were fired by Iraqis, whether into Kuwait where I am right now or into southern Iraq or elsewhere, had anything other than conventional warheads?

Rumsfeld: Nothing that I've seen validated.

Q: Is there any evidence that Iraqis have actually fired a Scud missile?

Rumsfeld: Not that I've seen.

Q: That missile that went into Iran and hit an oil depot, was that fired by the Iraqis or as the Iranians and the Iraqis suggest by an errant perhaps cruise missile or other U.S. weapon?

Rumsfeld: The present speculation is that it was an Iraqi weapon, but it's possible that it wasn't, and that's the kind of thing that will have to be looked at, and the debris, the remnants of the weapon probably could be inspected and some determination made finally, but only after you have ground troops. Certainly if it was an errant weapon from a coalition force, it would have been an accident and totally unintended, but at least the preliminary estimate is that it's — it was an Iraqi weapon.

Q: What happens if the Iraqis, as the U.S. and coalition forces move closer towards Baghdad, Tikrit, which is the hometown of Saddam Hussein, what if the Iraqis do use chemical or biological weapons, radiological weapons against U.S. troops? How will the U.S. respond?

Rumsfeld: The coalition forces are trained and equipped to operate in that environment. There's no question but that if it's done, it will slow things down. There's no way it will change the outcome, and what is also certain is that anyone who is involved in following out an order to use weapons, chemical or biological weapons, will be hunted down and treated with accordingly.

The important thing to remember, Wolf, is that Saddam Hussein cannot use weapons of mass destruction himself. He can give the order. But someone is going to have to carry out that order, and numbers of people are going to have to carry out that order, and those people are being told in no uncertain terms that they must not do that. If they follow those orders, they will be tracked down and punished.

Q: By all accounts, Mr. Secretary, the big battles are still coming. The notion that it was supposedly relatively easy in the south where the Shia are dominant, as you get closer to Baghdad, Tikrit, the Republican Guard, the Special Republican Guard, the defenses, the resistance might be more intense. Are you expecting heavy resistance from these so-called elite Republican Guard units?

Secretary Rumsfeld interview with CNN Late Edition continued

Rumsfeld: It's a distinct possibility. The Republican Guard units and the special operators have been pulling back towards the Baghdad/Tikrit area for a period of some weeks. We have been in touch with some of them. There is at least the prospect that some of them will surrender and assist us. There's also the prospect that the resistance will get a good deal more difficult, and that the progress will be slower.

We've been in the country just for 72 hours, and the forces are moving towards Baghdad, and thus far, the air war and the ground war have gone along in an excellent manner.

Q: How far precisely, if you can tell us, are the troops from Baghdad, the outskirts of Baghdad?

Rumsfeld: Well, they're moving along ahead of plan. Let me leave it there. We have smaller elements in various places, and then we have main elements that are moving up towards — from the south in the direction of Baghdad, but I don't want to give particulars as to exactly where they are.

Q: Is, as far as you know, Saddam Hussein alive?

Rumsfeld: We have to assume he is. There's no question but that there were senior Iraqi regime leadership in the compound, which we attacked several nights ago, and the intelligence reports suggest that the attacks were successful in terms of hitting targets. What is not knowable from the air or from long distance is precisely who was where in that compound at any given moment when the weapons actually struck. But we are optimistic that we have effectively hit a regime command and control target, and time will tell who was in it.

Q: Is there any evidence Saddam Hussein was injured in that specific attack on the first night of the war?

Rumsfeld: You know, the word evidence is a hard one. The standard of evidence that people hold others to varies depending if you're in a court of law or in a war. And in a war, the kind of evidence that people are thinking about doesn't exist, for the most part. You just don't get ground truth instantaneously in situations like that. We have reports from people who suggest that they were eyewitnesses to certain things, but we can't go out and double check them, and you can't talk to other people who had a different perspective, and, therefore, it's not possible to know of certain knowledge precisely what took place.

Q: Is he, though, in control, as far as you can tell, of his military and of the regime?

Rumsfeld: Well, we'll know more the closer we get to Baghdad and Tikrit, one would think. But we hear reports that there seems to be some disarray in the Iraqi leadership, that is — by — that's speculation. I would call it speculation. It's surmise. It's hard to say precisely. In these kinds of situations, we could be being tricked in some way.

So these things will unfold. What we do know is that the outcome is certain, that if people want to save lives, they should surrender.

We're telling them in multiple ways through leaflets, through the radio, through television, through direct communication by telephone how they can avoid being killed and how they can help their country and liberate their people, and they'd best do that, because it will just take us longer, but it will still happen.

Q: Could you tell us what the line of communication is between the U.S. and the Republican Guard in trying to encourage them to surrender?

Rumsfeld: It varies from unit to unit, and it tends to be in a variety of different ways, and I don't know that I'd want to get into the details.

Q: But you can tell us it's ongoing, it's continuing right now?

Rumsfeld: That's correct. On a unit level.

Q: Are you upbeat — are you — on a unit-to-unit level meaning U.S. military personnel or intelligence community personnel?

Rumsfeld: It varies, but it is at the unit level. It is not at a senior Iraqi armed services or regime level. There aren't any kind of negotiations going on at the very top level. The discussions that take place relate to specific units, and we've had good success in a number of units surrendering, and that's made a lot of sense. People's lives have been saved.

Q: There was a report here in the Gulf suggesting three top Iraqi leaders may have been killed in that initial air strike, Tariq Aziz, the deputy prime minister, Ali Al Majeed, so-called Chemical Ali, and Izzat Ibrahim. Do you have evidence that any of those three may have been killed in that initial air strike?

Rumsfeld: No, I don't.

Q: Let's move on and talk about the air strikes. As you know, they're meeting with widespread criticism. The pictures that were seen around the world showed huge explosions in Baghdad, and the air strikes, of course, continue. How can you be so sure that innocent civilians are not dying in those air strikes?

Rumsfeld: Wolf, I saw some of those images that were carried on television around the world, and no one could watch them and not just feel your heart break that people can be killed and that there can be some unintended loss of life. The fact, however, is that there was not an attack on Baghdad. There was an attack on the Iraqi regime, and it was as precise as ever before in the history of warfare. The care that went into the targeting is just breathtaking, and it is — and the battle damage assessments and the people from the ground that we talked to are telling us that very — to a great extent in Baghdad, people are going about their business, because they are so impressed with the precision of those targeting and those bombs and those attacks, that they feel that the coalition forces are doing it in the best possible way.

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It looks like it's a bombing of a city, but it isn't. It is a bombing of military targets, very precisely, and regime targets, and the television image is belied by what's seen on the ground.

Q: But we've spoken to journalists, Mr. Secretary, who were there, who heard the explosions, the thunder, they said the earth basically shook for them, they said it was a terrifying experience. There are some five million people who probably were terrified during that ordeal and continue to be terrified right now. The question is this, is this the way to win over the hearts and minds of the Iraqi people?

Rumsfeld: Wolf, the Iraqi people are hostages to a vicious regime. They will be liberated. It's going to happen. The only way to do it, they tried diplomacy for 13 years. They tried economic sanctions. Neither worked. They tried limited military applications in the northern and southern no-fly zones. That didn't work. They tried 17 U.N. resolutions. President Bush went one extra step and provided 48 hours for the Iraqi regime to leave the country and leave it without a conflict. Every single effort was rebutted, rejected.

Now, that leaves only one course. You say, is there any way to do it without conflict? No, everything else was tried. And the Iraqi people are going to end up liberated. The ones that have been liberated in the southern part of this country are grateful and appreciative, and that will be the case as Baghdad is liberated.

Q: But there are plenty of people out there, counterterrorism experts, who have already expressed fear that the images of this bombing, the Shock and Awe campaign, will merely ferment terrorism, create new recruits for al Qaeda and other terrorist groups to go after American targets.

Rumsfeld: Wolf, I know there's lots of so-called experts opining on this and that. The fact is that the terrorists did not need any provocation. They attacked the United States of America on September 11, viciously killed 3,000 innocent men, women and children of every religion, of every nationality across the globe. That was not a response to an attack on Baghdad. It was an unprovoked attack.

They are raising money, they are training people. We stopped them in Afghanistan. We tore up their terrorist training camps. We drove them out of that country, and in that country now there's a government that's representative of the Afghan people. And that is what's going to happen in Iraq. And the idea that — that this is provocative is wrong. Weakness is provocative. It entices people to do things they otherwise wouldn't do, and war is everybody's last choice. No rational person wants war. President Bush doesn't. The American people don't.

Q: General Myers said the other day that the war was moving on all fronts in the south, in the west and in the northern part of Iraq. Let's go through a few specific details. In the south, I assume Umm Qasr, the key port in the south, has been captured and secure. What about Basra and Nasiriyah?

Rumsfeld: I don't use the word secure, and the reason I don't on

the port is because nothing's perfect. There's no question but that the coalition forces have occupied the port area. They're now in the process of taking mines out of the waters so that humanitarian assistance and medical supplies and food can come in through that port.

But I suspect that there will continue to be sporadic firefights from some dead-enders who don't want to give up, so I think that secure is probably somewhat of an overstatement.

Basra is the same situation. The forces that moved in from the south. Most of the resistance has ended in the Basra area, but there will, I would suspect, continue to be some dead-enders who will continue to fire at coalition forces.

The oil wells in the south have been secured, quote/unquote, but there again, there could be some untidiness as we go forward. And British forces are now occupying the bulk of those — that area where the oil wells are, and it's important that they be saved for the Iraqi people. There are about 10 wells that are burning, and we have people coming in in the next 48 hours who will begin to put those fires out.

As forces move north, there will be conflict and firefights, but we won't know whether the resistance, once we get closer to Baghdad, will be different from what we've experienced in the south, but I think it's reasonable to expect that it might be much more fierce.

Q: And in Nasiriyah, is that yet under coalition control?

Rumsfeld: The forces are clearly in that area, and I'll leave it to General Franks and his terrific team of people to characterize the progress that's being made by coalition forces.

Q: Let's talk about western Iraq for a moment. Can people in Israel sleep easier tonight because U.S. forces are in control of that so-called H-2 and H-3 airfield from which so many Scuds, 39 Scuds, to be specific, were launched against Israel during the first Gulf War?

Rumsfeld: Well, there's no question but that that is the area where the ballistic missiles were launched last time, and they put at risk neighboring countries as well as Israel. We have a lot of special operators ranging across that generally vacant area, unpopulated area, and we feel pretty good about the fact that we've covered a lot of that ground. I wouldn't want to say that it's absolutely certain that something couldn't be fired from that area, but given the overhead control we have, the air superiority, indeed, air dominance in that part of the country and the number of people on the ground, I think that we can feel much better today than yesterday or the day before with respect to that issue.

Q: Mr. Secretary, I know your time is limited. Before I let you go, very briefly on the north. Turkey, there are conflicting reports whether Turkish forces have, indeed, moved across the line into

List of casualties, POWs, MIAs

By The Associated Press

List of 20 U.S. troops killed and 14 captured or missing in war on Iraq. Sources: U.S. military and relatives. Hometowns may be those of family.

Killed

- Nine Marines, fighting near An Nasiriyah, encountered Iraqi troops pretending to surrender, March 23. Sgt. Michael E. Bitz, 31, Ventura, Calif.; Lance Cpl. Brian Rory Buesing, 20, of Cedar Key, Fla.; Lance Cpl. David K. Fribley, 26, Lee, Fla.; Cpl. Jose A. Garibay, 21, Orange, Calif.; Cpl. Jorge A. Gonzalez, 20, Los Angeles; Staff Sgt. Phillip A. Jordan, 42, Brazoria, Texas; 2nd Lt. Frederick E. Pokorney Jr., 31, Nye, Nev.; Cpl. Randal Kent Rosacker, 21, San Diego, Calif.; Lance Cpl. Thomas J. Slocum, age unknown, Adams, Colo.

- Army Capt. Christopher Scott Seifert, 27, of Easton, Pa., grenade attack at 101st Airborne Division camp in Kuwait, March 23. U.S. soldier suspected in attack, military officials say.

- Army Reserve Spc. Brandon S. Tobler, 19, of Portland, Ore., non-combat vehicle accident in Iraq, March 22.

- Navy Lt. Thomas Mullen Adams, 27, of La Mesa, Calif., collision of two British helicopters, March 22.

- Marine Capt. Ryan Anthony Beaupre, 30, of Bloomington, Ill.; Marine Cpl. Brian Matthew Kennedy, 25, of Houston; Marine Staff Sgt. Kendall Damon Waters-Bey, 29, of Baltimore; Marine Maj. Jay Thomas Aubin, 36, of Waterville, Maine. Helicopter crash in Kuwait, March 21.

- Marine 2nd Lt. Therrel S. Childers, 30, of Harrison County, Miss.; Marine Lance Cpl. Jose Gutierrez, 22, of Los Angeles. Ground combat in Iraq, March 21.

- Marine Lance Cpl. Eric J. Orlowski, 26, of Buffalo, N.Y. Machine

gun accidentally discharged, date uncertain.

- Sgt. Nicolas M. Hodson, 22, of Smithville, Mo. Vehicle accident in Iraq, date uncertain.

Captured

- Army Chief Warrant Officer 2 Ronald D. Young Jr., 26, from Lithia Springs, Ga.; Chief Warrant Officer 2 David S. Williams, 30, from Orlando, Fla. Pilots of Apache helicopter downed after not returning from mission March 23. Shown in Iraqi state television March 24, apparently uninjured.

- Army Spc. Joseph Hudson, 23, of Almagordo, N.M.; Army Pfc. Patrick Miller, 23, of Park City, Kan.; Army Spc. Shoshana Johnson, 30, of Fort Bliss, Texas; Edgar Hernandez, 21, supply truck driver, of Mission, Texas, rank unknown; Army Sgt. James Riley, 31, of Pennsauken; N.J. Shown on Iraqi television after pre-dawn ambush of convoy near An Nasiriyah, southwestern Iraq, March 23.

Missing

In addition, seven others were classified as missing from An Nasiriyah. Among them: Army Pvt. Brandon Sloan, 19, of Bedford Heights, Ohio, Pfc. Lori Piestewa, 22, of Tuba City, Ariz., Pfc. Jessica Lynch, 19, supply clerk, of Palestine, W.Va., and Spc. James Kiehl, 22, of Comfort, Texas, family members said. The names of three others were not available.

Iraqi TV displayed four bodies of what it said were Americans from the attack.



Secretary Rumsfeld interview with CNN Late Edition continued

northern Iraq or not. Have Turkish forces gone into northern Iraq, and does the United States want them to be there?

Rumsfeld: I've been hearing reports from the press almost every four hours for the past three or four or five days reporting or alleging or speculating that Turkish forces have moved into northern Iraq in force. I can say two things about that, we have no intelligence evidence that suggests that's true. Second, the Turkish forces tell us repeatedly that it is not true.

I believe them. In the event that we find that not to be the case, why, obviously that would be unfortunate.

Q: Are U.S. warplanes flying over Turkish airspace now as they go on bombing runs towards Iraq?

Rumsfeld: U.S. coalition aircraft are flying over all of Iraq. There's

no question about it. They're covering every inch of that country.

Q: And the Shock and Awe campaign is going to continue for how long?

Rumsfeld: The ground attack and the air attack is going to continue with precision and care until the Iraqi regime is removed, and we have been able to find and dismantle their weapon-producing capabilities.

Q: Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, thanks very much for joining us.

Rumsfeld: Thank you.

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Revolt reported under way in Basra

BASRA, Iraq (CNN) — British commanders said it appeared a popular uprising against the ruling Baath Party was under way in Basra as British troops and tanks were maneuvering under the cover of darkness near the southern Iraq city.

Juliet Bremner, a correspondent with the British network ITV with troops outside the city, said the commanders told her they had seen groups of 40 to 50 citizens at various locations on the streets and that British forces had taken out an Iraqi mortar that had been firing on the apparent protesters.

Bremner and her ITV colleague Romilly Weeks said British forces were preparing to enter the city if they determined such a move would be useful.

The residents of Basra, an important center of Iraq's Shiite population, staged an uprising after the Persian Gulf War of 1991. But without backup from any coalition forces that had driven Saddam Hussein's regime out of Kuwait, hundreds of thousands were killed.

In Washington, a U.S. official said there were "mixed reports" about a possible civilian uprising in Basra. "It's more like chaos than anything else," the official said.

Earlier Tuesday, British forces repelled a battalion-size counterattack in Basra.

They also seized a top Baath Party official — a move meant to inspire a popular uprising, said Col. Chris Vernon, British military spokesman in Kuwait City. 20 Iraqi militia members were killed in the raid, Vernon said.

"Whap, we're in. Whap, we're out, and 20 of them are gone," Vernon said.

Basra, Iraq's second-largest city, had been largely without electricity and water since Friday.

Originally, coalition troops wanted to isolate the city and any Iraqi forces in it, while the main coalition force moved north, British officials told Amanpour.

The change in military strategy was described by British officials as a "difficult and high risk" operation. No timetable was given.

Spokesman Group Captain Al Lockwood told CNN: "It would have been ideal if Basra had surrendered and we had been able to take the city without a fight. But we will probably need to go in and beat any resistance."

On Monday, there was 10 hours of fighting between Britain's 7th Armoured Brigade and Iraqi forces on the outskirts of Basra. There were no British casualties and there was no word from coalition forces on any Iraqi casualties.

British officials believe the Iraqis may be trying to bring reinforcements into eastern Basra from the north. British troops are in an arc around the west of the city and say they are working to



British troops in southern Iraq.

prevent any Iraqi reinforcement.

Lockwood added: "What TV viewers are seeing are small skirmishes. The overall plans are on track and on time."

The Iraqis fighting in Basra were "irregulars," lightly armed and few in number, Lockwood said.

But, he said, they were members of the Fedayin, extremely loyal to Saddam Hussein, who had been terrorizing the citizens of Basra.

Lockwood said humanitarian relief was a priority and British forces were actively involved in opening Iraq's main port of Umm Qasr to the south as quickly as possible. The Royal Navy and other coalition naval forces were clearing the channel of mines, he said.

But Iraqi Trade Minister Muhammad Mahdi al-Salih Tuesday said the U.S. and Britain were holding up shipments of food and medical supplies which Iraq would receive under the oil for food program.

He said the shipments could feed the Iraqi people for two years and asked U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan to ensure they were sent.

The U.N. was due to discuss the oil for food program Tuesday.



British "Desert Rats" Royal Fusiliers, Zulu Company, pose with a portrait of Saddam Hussein taken from local Baath Party buildings in Basra, southern Iraq, on March 24 . (AP)



Taps for the fallen: A United States Marine with the 3rd Marine Air Wing band plays Taps near the end of a memorial service at an air base in the Gulf region for the four Marines who died when their CH-46E Sea Knight helicopter crashed Friday in Kuwait during a mission in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. (AP/Julie Jacobson)



Preparing for military action against Iraq, Australian soldiers from the 4th Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment (Commando) use state-of-the-art night vision equipment to conduct a night patrol in mid-March on a remote range. The soldiers are a critical part of the Special Forces Task Group deployed to the Middle East. Australian Defence Force photo by Darren Hilder

Turkish soldiers stand guard at a check point in Silopi on the Turkish-Iraqi border, southeastern Turkey, Tuesday March 25, 2003. A Turkish armored personnel carrier and half a dozen Turkish commandos check every vehicle heading toward the Iraqi border, which is off limits to journalists. (AP Photo/Murad Sezer)



Suspicious activity: Infantry with Task Force 2-69 Armor of the 3rd Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division from Fort Benning, Ga., disembark from a Bradley Fighting Vehicle to surround a man who was stopped for suspicious activity somewhere in Iraq, Monday. (AP Photo/The Dallas Morning News, David Leeson)

